Risk Factors for Epilepsy

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En Español (Spanish Version)

A risk factor is something that increases your likelihood of getting a disease or condition. It is possible to develop epilepsy with or without the risk factors listed below. However, the more risk factors you have, the greater your likelihood of developing epilepsy. If you have a number of risk factors, ask your doctor what you can do to reduce your risk.

Risk factors for epilepsy include:

Medical Conditions

Any injury to the brain, either from external (environmental) or internal (medical/metabolic) sources can increase your risk of epilepsy.

Side View of the Brain

Brain injury can be caused by:

- Head injury
- Stroke
- Alzheimer’s disease
- Tumors (primary or metastatic)
- Heart failure
- Kidney failure
- Liver failure
- Any condition that deprives the brain of oxygen, such as near-drowning
- Sleep deprivation
Infectious diseases, such as:
- Meningitis
- AIDS
- Viral encephalitis
- Hydrocephalus (excess fluid in the brain)
- Celiac disease (intolerance to wheat gluten)
- Metabolic conditions, such as low blood sugar, high or low salt, low magnesium or calcium

Genetic Factors

In some cases, epilepsy can result from genetic abnormalities inherited at birth.

Age

Different causes and types of seizures are more or less likely depending on your age.

In children, risk factors include:
- High fever
- Poor nutrition

Other Factors

Other factors that can increase your risk of epilepsy include:
- Exposure to:
  - Lead
  - Carbon monoxide
  - Other environmental toxins
- Certain illegal drugs
- Overdose or withdrawal of antidepressants and other medications
- Medication interactions
- Alcoholism
- Cysticercosis (an infection caused by a pork tapeworm)

REFERENCES:


Epilepsy Foundation website. Available at: http://www.epilepsyfoundation.org/.


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